

Kathlyn Williams' Experiences In a Desert Sand Storm; How She Learned To Ride a Camel

By KATHLYN WILLIAMS.

I am very glad to write about my adventures and experiences while out in the California Desert, working in the production of the new Selig picture—"The Carpet From Bagdad."

Of course, I am accustomed to all sorts of strange and unusual conditions which I find necessary in the production of any big picture, but I do want to say that my experience in the California Desert was one of the wildest and weirdest I ever endured.

You, who have read the novel of Harold MacGrath, will recall that the principal scenes in "The Carpet From Bagdad" are laid in the great Arabian Desert, and some of the principal characters are Arabs; so Mr. Colin Campbell, in making his arrangements for appropriate properties, bought a lot of real and most interesting Arabian trappings, including those wonderfully striped tents, bales and bales of beautiful rugs, camel harness, those peculiar Arab guns so beautifully inlaid with mother-of-pearl and studded with jewels, great water jars, etc. The garments made in Arabia especially for those who were to participate in "The Carpet From Bagdad" were supplied in ample quantities, so that we could look the part and be presented to the world as the genuine article.

From the big Selig Jungle-Zoo out at Eastlake, in Los Angeles, Mr. Campbell made a requisition for about twenty camels. You can just imagine a man writing a requisition on a slip of paper just as though it were for twenty pairs of pins, or twenty articles of any kind. These camels,



which by the way are the homeliest brutes I ever have seen, were outfit in exactly the same manner as though they were to make a journey across the real Arabian Desert.

I guess that there is really very little difference in the Arabian Desert and our own American desert. At any rate the Arabian Desert cannot be any worse. There are miles and miles of soft sand into which the feet sink and when there is even the slightest wind, the clouds of sand circulate about moving figures and almost suffocate one.

We moved out into the desert with our caravan completely equipped as though we were going to cross a real big desert in earnest. There were the strings of camels with their long, straggly necks decorated with tinkling bells and made gay by strips and streamers of gay colored cloth. We had real Arab boys to guide the camels and those who rode on horseback had genuine Arab horses of the very finest breed.

This was really a business trip and

Instructions were given that no trunks or clothing, except that suitable for the pictures, were to be taken along. No one was permitted to carry any excess baggage. In fact, all members of the company except those of us who took the part of Europeans, were instructed to take along nothing except the Arabian garments in order that they might learn to wear them in a natural way and more effectively portray the part. Of course, I kept my part throughout, as a European girl, while Miss Eugenie Besserer, who played the part of my mother, also took the part throughout of a European.

Arabian Nights Tale.

It looked like a tale out of the Arabian Nights when our caravan started across the desert. The piercing rays of the sun fell upon us with all the mercy as the day was hot, but we all enveloped our heads and faces in the voluminous folds of Arab cloths, so that the sifting sand dust did not bother us as much as we expected.

Following behind the strictly oriental caravan came the up-to-date American parade, consisting of huge wagons, many of which bore enormous tanks containing thousands of gallons of water. This was a special provision made at the instructions of Mr. Selig, and for which we were all grateful before another day had passed. These enormous wagons were hauled by a number of pairs of horses—sixteen or twenty—I do not remember which. They were equipped with broad tires so that the wheels did not sink deeply into the sand. They were especially constructed for use on the desert. Behind the big tank wagons came other wagons loaded with tents, provisions, cooking utensils and the entire camp outfit.

Through the thoughtfulness of Mr. Selig our provisions were not limited to necessities. There were countless additions to the ordinary larder, and there was one huge wagon loaded with ice. When we camped for the night,

there was a great hustling and bustling about. The camels were ordered to kneel and Arab riders and drivers buried themselves underneath the folds of their capacious burnouses, so that the sand could cover them completely without injury.

Storm Approaches.

Those of us in the automobiles huddled in our seats and were covered with large cloths which completely enveloped machine and occupant. They did not cover us up until the last minute, so that we could see the storm approaching. We could see pillars of swirling and twisting sand, each surrounded by a nimbus of dust through which the sun shot its rays making various tints all of which were sad and lifeless. It is really a difficult thing, I suppose, to get much beauty out of a dust cloud. The storm swept nearer and nearer. The camels grumbled but laid their long necks straight on the ground ready to meet the storm.

As soon as the dust began to swirl about us, we were enveloped in the huge cloths covering the automobile, and we remained under cover until the storm had swept past. Luckily, it was not a severe storm. It lasted only about ten minutes, and we could see it swirling and twisting in the distance as it passed on over the desert.

The men of the party rode here and there always keeping within sight of the caravan and they brought back for our inspection those ugly little horned toads, an amazing collection of lizards, while they reported the conquest of several rattle-snakes.

We passed an old miner—a typical "Ager," dressed in a gray woolen shirt, corduroy trousers and long heavy boots. He was camped by the wayside, his only companion being a tiny burro, dressed in an enormous pack saddle. The old man had his pick and shovel and gold-pan strapped to the pack saddle and evidently had hopes of finding some place to use them. Our party greeted him jovially and wished him good luck, but he sat by his little camp fire unmoved and with no more expression on his features than his companion, the burro.

In the desert, one day is just about the same as another day, while the nights offer no change from the monotony. Of course, we had a big tent which we used as a drawing-room and there in the evening we sat about with music sometimes, giving a bridge party, and enjoying ourselves in various ways. Several in the party had good voices, so we had some singing of excellent quality.

One thing we were always careful about, was to make a thorough examination of our bedding before retiring for the night. More than one member of the party gave vent to ejaculations of horror upon the discovery of a scorpion or centipede, which evidently thought the bed had been especially prepared for his comfort.

Day by day the picture making went on. There was mad riding on horseback and camelback. There was shooting, and I will never forget the day of the fierce combat which was so realistic that we all shuddered, and felt that we had witnessed a tragedy, indeed. Of course, during the action of the piece, other fights were pictured, but the big fight in the desert, only one that will fascinate every one who sees the picture.

One particular thing about our desert journey, at least the fact was peculiar to us, occidentals, was the close application of the Arabs and other Mohammedans in our train, to their religious duties. They had a muezzin, who was also a whirling dervish, and he called the devotees of Mohammed to prayers as strictly as though they were in their own home country.

Enjoyable Feature.

An exceptionally enjoyable feature in connection with our trip, was the privilege of taking a bath—something never before done in the desert. Mr. Selig had an eye to the comfort of the members of his troupe, and instructed that arrangements should be made for a plentiful supply of water to be used for bathing purposes. I don't suppose that ever before in the history of a desert caravan, were daily baths indulged in by members of a party. I don't mean to intimate that everybody took baths, but some of us did, and it made life less difficult under the dreadful and mournful surroundings.

It took us a long time in the desert, and the work was hard, but we know that it must be accomplished and we all did our best. So that when you see "The Carpet From Bagdad" produced in a great Selig photoplay, those of you who read this article, will recall the substance of my writing. We did not move about much and we were fairly comfortable during the weeks spent in the desert.

I can realize how a man, alone amid the trackless waste of sands, can become hopeless and helpless especially when without water. I will never forget one day when we had ridden several miles from camp, that we discovered that the camels had been left behind. There was no water to drink. Of course, we were without water for only a few hours, but the very fact that we could not have it when we wanted it, made us desire it all the more.

I have experienced more pleasant occasions than our trip through the California Desert, and I also have experienced occasions that were more unpleasant. The desert traveler equipped with primitive conveniences, and with limited supplies of food and water, naturally finds such a trip a hardship, but we, equipped with every modern convenience and supplied with all sorts of luxuries, really did not great inconvenience. But, it is really a wonderful and strange experience to travel for a short time in the desert.

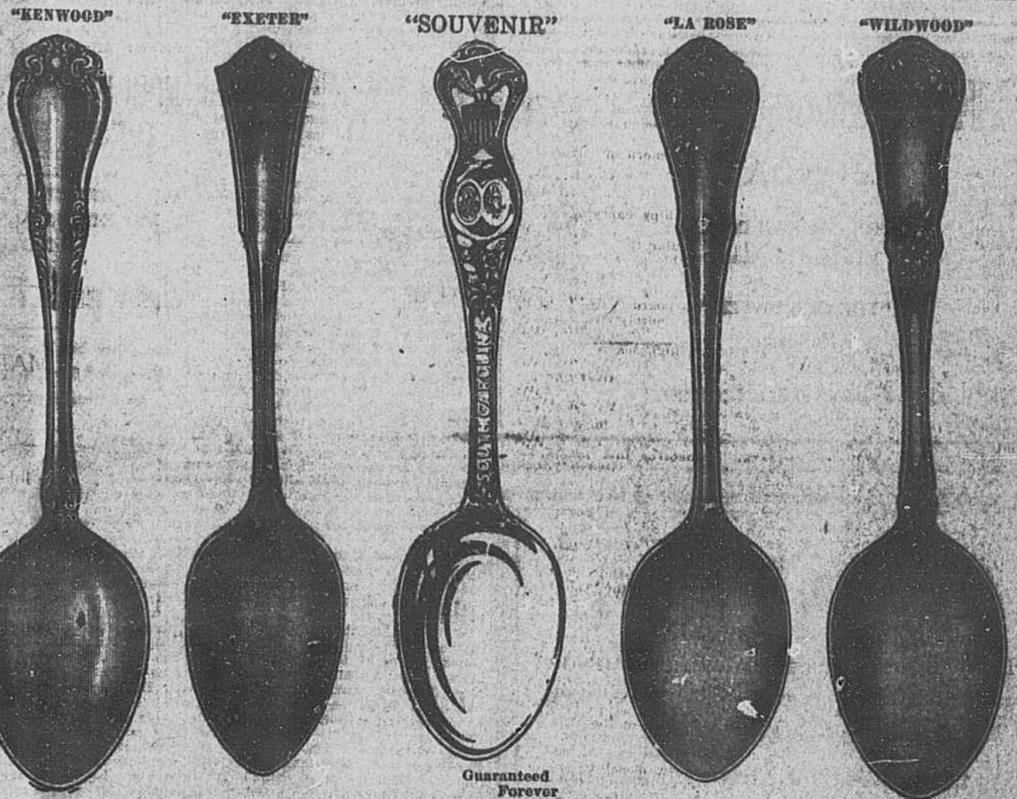
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